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ABSTRACT

Higher level questions can link evaluation directly to language related class activities. Utilizing higher level questions is a powerful pedagogical technique and serves many direct purposes in the class environment. One of the models most commonly taught to teachers is Hilda Taba's levels of questions. Taba's model delineates four related teaching strategies: concept development, interpretation of data, application of generalizations, and resolution of conflict. At each of these levels, teachers must encourage participation; stimulate higher-lever thinking, and ask a variety of open-ended questions of all students. Students must be encouraged to respond, to provide evidence or reasoning to support inferences at all levels, and be taught how to evaluate their own questions and thinking habits. The four kinds of questions from this model include: focusing questions, questions calling for variety, questions calling for clarification or extension, and questions calling for reasons or support for ideas. How the model can be used is demonstrated with a poem. In teaching higher-level questions in the language arts, teachers can monitor progress through observational techniques and evaluation of class questions to determine appropriate modification of their lessons. Higher-level thinking questions can ensure success in all phases of cognitive, intuitive, affective and physical development of the total student. Students will then be more capable of demonstrating skills and knowledge in self-evaluation and directing their own thinking and learning. (MG)

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USING HIGHER LEVEL QUESTIONING AS A METHOD TO IMPROVE EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Using Higher Level Questioning as a Method to Improve Evaluation of Language Skills

Higher-level questions can link evaluation directly to language related class activities. Questions are required as a part of every learning experience, and there is little doubt that the language arts skills are required as part of any learning behavior. Utilizing higher level questions is a powerful pedagogical technique and serves many direct purposes in the class environment. The literature indicates that many teachers are not aware of the multiple purposes a single question can achieve (Beyer, l987 and Hyman, 1979). They frequently misuse it as a technique in the teaching of higher-levels of thinking and evaluation, which are crucial and an ongoing part of the teaching/learning environment.

However, research has made some interesting comments about the relationship between the kinds of questions language arts teachers ask and the kinds of responses students give. One of the first statements made is that teachers of language arts constantly ask questions that require a very specific response (i.e. right or wrong). For example, the research conducted by

Nettles (1988) demonstrates that teachers of language arts did not ask as many probing kinds of questions designed to initiate discussion as teachers of other subjects. Since language arts encourages the development of the total student, there, how questions are asked is very important in stimulating higher levels of thinking and learning. Repeated questions geared to memory-recall of information and predetermined answers emphasize lower-level thinking skills.

The concern about the kinds of questions teachers ask students is not new. Cushenberry (1983) refers to research conducted in the sixties on this same issue. The research indicated that 70 percent of the questions teachers ask students during reading lessons were either factual or literal queries. Cushenberry pointed out that almost all questions cited in the manuals for teachers of reading appear to be of immediate recall of facts and details.

Further, there are difficulties with subjecting students to pencil-and paper teacher made tests requiring a yes/no response. This kind of exercise only allows for an analysis of the students' quick rote memory; it does not allow for the consistent

evaluation of the students' ability to expand and extend language concepts. Asking questions of students which lead to specific answers rather than possible conclusions in the language arts, is signaling to students to become passive rather than active learners. Thus, class evaluation should actively engage students tackling literary passages, gathering and clarifying evidence, arranging arguments and willing to probe during the task until new insight is gleaned (Wiggins, 1989).

If teachers of language arts design their activities to include higher- level questions, then students will most likely response with higher- level answers and activities, thus, capitalizing on their natural curiosities, interests, questioning attitudes, thoughts and feelings. Teachers then provide lots of practice during the day-to-day classroom experiences for students to reveal what they know through their responses to higher-levels language arts questions. The ability to evaluate appropriate task related activities in the language arts depends upon knowing what higher level questions to ask and linking results to course objectives and evaluation during daily lessons.

If teachers of language arts want to seriously engage

students in the responding, asking and self-evaluation process through higher-level questions, they should adjust what is taught during a lesson (content) as well as modify strategies employed. The level of thinking and questions students are expected to use (Process) are also critical components of the learning climate which ultimately enable students to accomplish tasks expected of them as a result of the process (product).

Classification of Questions

Research on the classifying of questions indicates that models most commonly taught to teachers are based on Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Aschner-Gallagher's classification system and Hilda Taba's levels of questions (e.g. Science Teacher (1976), Beyers, 1987; Taba, 1967; Seifert, 1985; Maker, 1982). Bloom's model classifies questions from six basic categories of mental operations: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The Aschner-Gallagher's model consists of the mental activities of cognitive memory, convergent production, divergent production and evaluation. While all three models are used to classify types of questions,

Hilda Taba, " who pioneered in showing teachers the importance of levels and sequencing of questions," delineates four related teaching strategies: concept development, interpretation of data, application of generalizations, and resolution of conflict (Beyer, l988, p. 152). At each of these levels, teachers must encourage participation; stimulate thinking of higher- levels , and ask a variety of open-ended questions of **all** students. They must be encouraged to respond and to provide evidence or reasoning to support inferences at all levels. The students must be taught how to evaluate their own questions and thinking habits.

During the initial stage of each of Taba's strategies, students are asked to list information that is relevant to the focus of the discussion. They are required to recall and provide clarification to the meanings of words rather than give inferences. There are four kinds of questions from the Taba's model which include:

Focusing Questions, which require students to focus exclusively on a task at the initial stage of an

activity.

Questions Calling for Variety, which require students to come up with completely different responses from those already given.

Questions Calling for Clarification or Extension, which require students to explain the meaning of statements or words, provide specific examples or elaborate on an idea to extend its meaning.

Questions Calling for Reasons or Support for Ideas, which require students to explain or cite reasons for the inferences, conclusions, or generalizations they have made.

Beyer (1987) describes Hilda Taba's model as one which can be applied to the daily class use for students in practicing and generalizing various higher levels of thinking tasks such as problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking and decision making skills. Similarly, it is a useful option for providing students practice in metacognitive strategies (self-montoring, checking, evaluation) in the language

arts areas.

According to the model, the correspondence between the nature of the learner and the effectiveness of teaching methods determine the extent of specific higher levels learning class experiences. In teaching higher level questions in the language arts, teachers can monitor frequently through observational techniques and evaluation of class questions to determine appropriate modification of their lessons.

Teachers of language arts can systematically develop higher levels of thinking, open-ended questions which include elaboration of reasoning and logic using the Taba's strategies. Each level calls for direct teaching and asking higher-level questions which allows teachers to assess immediately the students' level of content direction, and provide students the opportunity to practice monitoring and self-evaluation of their own thinking. According to Gickling and Havertape (1988), "if assessment information is not immediately convertible, then it is of limited instructional use " (p.169).

Therefore, language arts teachers can immediately evaluate their own teaching level and sequencing of higher

levels of questions through a variety of class activities (discussion, investigative techniques, observation, trips, demonstrations and games) and pacing of language arts concepts and skills.

Methods for Teaching higher level Questions

The ability to ask higher-level questions is an important skill for students who must solve problems and handle complex tasks in today's informational and technological society. However, many students are hesitant to ask questions in class due to embarrassing moments of having asked questions in the past that the teacher responded to negatively. Therefore, it is important that the language arts teacher serve as a role model and be flexible and amenable to divergent thinking in her class.

There are many techniques that will serve to increase the questioning strategies for students. Brainstorming is an ideal strategy for motivating students to think divergently and focus on the task at hand. Questions can serve as a focal point during the language arts lessons and can provide opportunities for students to share without criticism. In using brainstorming as a strategy in getting started, the teacher will sequence questions

so as to lead the student through the necessary levels and stages of the Taba's questioning model. An example of how the model can be utilized is demonstrated through a poem.

TOPIC: **Learning The Elements of Poetry**

Situation: Present poem entitled "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks

Focusing Activity: Have students to take turns reading portions of "We Real Cool"

<u>Stage I</u>: Learning Facts About Poetry

Teacher Questions

What is poetry?

What are the elements of poetry?

What are the figures of speech in the poem?

Sample Activity

Create a scene to show the rebellious nature of the characters.

<u>Stage II:</u> Discrimination of Differences in students from diverse backgrounds

Teacher Questions

What differences do you notice in students who come from

diverse backgrounds?

How do you account for these differences?

Sample Activity

Write a paragraph viewing these boys from a middle class perspective. Point out differences in their life styles.

Stage III: Drawing Inferences About Differences

Teacher Questions

What do you think these young boys have to boast about?

Suppose they were removed from their improvised environment and placed in a middle-class setting, how do you think they would react to being dropouts? What changes would you expect in their behaviors?

Sample Activity

Find two problems in today's society that are common among rebellious teenagers. What impact would these problems have on the community.

Stage IV: Finding Generalizations about Dropouts

Teacher Questions

Are these characteristics common among all races of

dropouts?

Sample Assignment

Rewrite the poem "We Real Cool", but this time you will present young boys who feel ashamed of their plight.

Stage V: Generalization of Application

Teacher Questions:

Can we see how understanding what motivates students to rebell can help organizations plan strategies to prevent teenage deliquent behaviors (teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, dropout, crime, gang violence, etc)?

What is likely to happen if these problems are left unattended?

Why are so many of these problems present today?

Sample Activity:

Suppose the government provided gainful employment for everyone able to work, what will be the impact of this on the lives of improvished teenagers.

Create a poem that would serve as a paradigm to be real cool where the teenagers have been rehabilitated, educated, and are now politically controlling their society.

Once students have engaged in and demonstrated proficiency in language arts higher-level thinking activites, such as those delineated here, they will be better able to make connections between academic learning and the real world. Therefore, higher-level thinking questions can ensure success in all phases of cognitive, intuitive, affective and physical development of the total student. The students will then be more capable of demonstrating skills and knowledge in self-evaluation and directing their own thinking and learning.